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ABSTRACT

This paper is intended as a discussion paper to open up talk in the literacy community on how literacy programs can account for the impact violence has on learning. It builds on the author's previous research on issues raised by literacy workers, educators, researchers, academics, therapists, and counselors concerning this impact. The current study is seeking to better understand what supports and what hinders making change in literacy programs so that the programs can more fully support learning for all women, and in particular those who have experienced violence. In this paper the author tries to reveal the processes of "dominant discourses" that exclude the issue of violence from education, thus making change unlikely. Seeing language and current practices as discourse offers a tool to get outside a focus on what is right and draw attention to examining how certain discourses open and close possibilities. (Contains 10 references.) (JDM)

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Creating Change in Literacy Programs:

Talking about taking account of violence

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J. Horsman

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This is intended as a discussion paper to open more talk in the literacy community about how literacy programs can take the impact of violence on learning more fully into account. This paper was written based on data from North America. I would love to hear what applies in your setting if you are outside that context, or to hear about the differences you experience in your country or region. I hope this discussion will be another step towards practical changes in literacy programming that will support learning for all.

I invite you to engage with these ideas, talk about them with your colleagues, and post your thoughts on line. Please post your reactions in the guest book on my website: **www.jennyhorsman.com** or e-mail me at: **feedback@jennyhorsman.com**. An on-line discussion in response to an earlier draft of this paper was held at *www.alphaplus.ca* - archives of that discussion can still be found at that site - it was called *"Creating Change."*

Please circulate widely: feel free to copy for discussion purposes.

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Introductions

Too Scared to Learn

Over the last few years I have been researching, writing and speaking about the impact of violence on learning. In 1996 and 1997, I travelled across Canada and interviewed literacy learners and workers, as well as therapists and counsellors for a research study. I wrote my first analysis of what I learned from this research in the discussion paper, *But I'm Not a Therapist.* During an on-line discussion of the issues raised literacy workers, educators, researchers and academics wrote comments and developed collective thinking about the issues. I incorporated many ideas posted on-line into the book: *Too Scared to Learn: Women, Violence and Education.* My current research builds on that study. At the outset I hoped my research would lead to changes in practice, this new study explores the process of change in literacy programs.

Making Change

For the current study I am working with Susan Heald (from the University of Manitoba). We are seeking to understand better what supports and what hinders making change in literacy programs so that they may more fully support learning for all women, and in particular, t' ose who have experienced violence.

Our partners in this research are:

- Parkdale Project Read, Toronto, Ontario
- The Learning Centre, Edmonton, Alberta
- Malaspina University-College, Duncan, British Columbia
- World Education, Boston, New England

We asked different types of organizations to participate. Our contacts were programs that had been active participants in my earlier research, and programs we knew were planning to take on projects to address issues of violence.

At Project Read, my local community program, I facilitated an intensive course that allowed women time to explore their lives and build their strengths as learners[1]. I envisaged this course as an

[1] This course, funded jointly by the National Literacy Secretariat and the Ontario Ministry of Colleges, Training and Universities, led to a manual of approaches and learning activities called *Moving Forward.* We are currently looking for programs interested in using the manual in their

opportunity to put everything I had learned through the earlier research process into practice and see what would happen. I led the group with the support of a therapist. I met with her bi-weekly to discuss the work I was doing and to explore the value of a process of "supervision" like that regularly used by therapists. She also led occasional workshops with the group. A focus group at Parkdale Project Read which included all the staff allowed us to consider the impact of the intensive group on the whole program.

At the Learning Centre and other programs in Edmonton and Camrose they have been developing various new initiatives. One project offering an intensive course integrating literacy and life skills involved the Edmonton John Howard Society and Elizabeth Fry Society. Judy Murphy and Bev Sochatsky described the dream[2] for this program as one which "saw women who had been in conflict with the law or were feeling vulnerable to being at risk being immersed in a program that could wrap around them in a supportive, positive way and provide a wholistic learning experience." (Murphy and Sochatsky, 2001). Mary Norton of the Learning Centre in Edmonton and Judy Murphy, the coordinator of Edmonton John Howard Society's Alternative Learning Program, now work together to offer joint programming for students in both programs drawing on the arts to support learning. Although these initiatives do not explicitly focus on violence, they are planned with a recognition that violence has been central in the lives of many learners and an interest in exploring how holistic education could be used to support learning for all.

Our focus groups in Edmonton were attended by staff of the Learning Centre, Edmonton John Howard Society, and the Write to Learn project in Camrose. During my earlier research study, Deborah Morgan, the creator of the Write to Learn project, invited me to spend a day with Chapters' students and staff, the literacy program she was running at the time. She knew that violence was an issue in the lives of learners in her program and had already written an article urging literacy programs to address the issue. Her current project builds on

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own setting and adding further activities and reflections to make it appropriate in a wide range of settings and communities.

[2] This project has led to a manual: *Women's Journeys in Self Discovery: An Integrated literacy and Life Skills Approach to Learning*, which provides detail of many of the activities used in the course, as well as an impression of the journey of the courses held in several different venues in prisons and in the community.

the focus on writing developed in the earlier program and encourages literacy workers to integrate writing into their literacy work.

At Malaspina University-College instructors at all levels of education - from adult basic education to university level courses, within the college and in a new store front reading and writing centre in the community - have been interested in exploring how to support learning for those who have experienced violence. We held a focus group with adult basic education instructors and interviewed several instructors, administrators, and counsellors to explore the potential for change and the barriers they envisaged in a college setting. As a result of my earlier research Douglas College in New Westminster has been running a course to support women "with violence in their background or foreground" in their learning in the college. I held a focus group with the instructor in that course, and other adult basic education instructors, and we were hosted by the president of the college for an informal discussion about the issues.

World Education in Boston obtained U.S. Department of Education government funding from the Women's Educational Equity Act Program to help adult educators and family violence services work together to support women who experience violence in their educational goals. As part of the project, six programs from New England had the opportunity to work collaboratively with organizations working on violence in their community on a joint project. The literacy workers meet together every three months for training and support sessions. I was a lead trainer for this project and was able to listen to program workers talk about the challenge of making change in their programs over several sessions, as well as interview some of them at their programs at the end of the first year. Susan Heald interviewed workers from every program.

In various workshops, presentations and discussions I have been able to introduce my earlier research study and issues of violence and learning to many more literacy workers in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario and New York State. An on-line discussion allowed me to reach literacy workers in various parts of the world. Participants who contributed identified themselves as working in Nepal, England, Canada, and the United States. Throughout all these sessions I listened carefully to how workers speak about the issues and the possibilities and limitations for creating change in their programs.

Over to you....

I am sure there are many more programs actively taking on issues of violence – I would love to hear from you if you are in such a program:

- What led you to take on this work?
- How are you doing it?
- What supports you in taking it on?
- What limits what you are able to do?

Have you attended any workshops to help you take on this issue? If so:

- What made you decide to go?
- What helped you decide to take action?
- What helped you convince others in your program that this was necessary?
- What helped and hindered you making change?

Discourse

The language we use to understand what we do is crucial. Sandra Butler asserts that "with a different language comes a completely different understanding of what we are doing[3]." I have found the concept of discourse a useful tool for helping me to think about the language that is commonly used in a given field – such as the language of adult literacy – and to notice how that language shapes understandings and practices within that field. Some discourses are dominant, reinforced by social institutions and widely used, others are minority discourses used to resist dominant or mainstream discourses.

I have come to believe that a range of "dominant discourses" make it challenging to change literacy programs. Dominant discourses include the most common ways of talking. These shape what we come to see as given and take for granted about ourselves and the world. They are reinforced by institutions and common

[3] In her workshop: Dreams and Promises: A Day of Reflection and Envisioning, Toronto, May 2001.

practices. Discourses underpin our practices. In earlier writing, I introduced the concept of discourse:

> When we speak of "illiterates," or "mothers," or any other category, we have a whole complex set of terms and assumptions implied by the category that allows us to understand what it means to be "illiterate" or "mother." All of these – language, assumptions, and meanings – constitute discourse. This oral and written language is found in and helps to shape bureaucratic processes and social relations. In this way it helps to form our subjectivity, our sense of self. (Horsman, 1990)

For example, my concept of "good mothering" will be shaped by a network of language and expectations about mothering. Not only is my understanding shaped by discourse, but so is the understanding of other mothers, social workers and child protection workers. As a result of this discourse, social workers are empowered to initiate processes through which my child may be taken away from me if they judge that I am not a "good mother;" this, in turn, reinforces the discourse. I may accept these discourses about mothering and be enthusiastic that the state regulates mothering practices in this way, or I may attempt to contest these discourses and challenge dominant understandings of good mothering. Through resistant discourses I can seek to reshape concepts of motherhood and contest assumptions embedded in dominant discourses, but the more firmly discourses are embedded in bureaucratic process and endorsed by institutional practices, the greater weight they have to shape taken for granted understandings I, and others, hold about my life.

I want to be clear that when describing discourses I am not trying to say they are wrong, or excuses for not taking up issues of violence. Instead, I am trying to reveal the processes that exclude the issue of violence from education and make change unlikely. I am not talking about attitudes, but about the ways the discourses we participate in shape how we think, what we see, what we imagine possible. For example, if we know that education is not therapy and all the "stuff" about the self and emotions is matter for therapy sessions, not the classroom, then we won't see any need to learn anything about counselling, because that is not part of the work of a teacher. When dominant discourses have the force of government

behind them, when they inform work practices, reporting processes, and structure funding, they are hard to resist.

A variety of discourses shape not only how we see ourselves – as teachers, educators, administrators or policy makers – but also our colleagues and students, what we understand about literacy and violence and what we are capable of taking on. These discourses shape what we see and so limit recognition of the extent of violence and the effects of violence on learning. In North America, violence is rarely spoken about in public spaces. We need to ask who benefits and who or what is served by silences about violence. The impact of violence is traditionally seen as separate from education, viewed instead as a matter for therapeutic interventions. This approach contributes to silences in education about the impact of violence on learning.

For example, when I first began tutoring a student who had told me about the long history of violence in her life, I struggled to find others who could help me figure out how to do this work responsibly. Initially, I would tell other literacy workers about what I was doing, but I when I repeatedly got responses that implied that this was work I shouldn't be doing and warned me that I was not a therapist, I learned to avoid saying too much. I was relieved when I found a counsellor in a nearby community agency who encouraged me and offered me support when I needed it. I was fortunate that my first approach to a counsellor was not met with further warnings that I was a literacy worker venturing into the terrain of therapy for which I was unqualified and should stop immediately,[4] as it would have been hard to withstand in those early days. The dominant discourses of therapy and education tell us that the two are separate professions. Only as I began to write about the area have I found others also exploring the creation of new discourses, new understandings of both fields, which bridge the divide between them.

Dominant discourses shape what we know as proper literacy work and so make it hard to change programs in ways that might support learning for those who have experienced violence. Discourses about violence and education seem key in shaping what "we" – literacy learners, teachers, administrators, researchers, policy makers

[4] I shall be forever grateful to Lois Heitner who encouraged me to explore new practices of literacy to support literacy learners who are survivors of violence. I have written about this initial tutoring in many places, but perhaps most clearly in 1994. Then I drew lessons from this work to argue for new literacy practices in 1996.

and funders - take for granted about literacy programming. They shape policy and expectations and the resources most people involved in the teaching interaction deem essential or unnecessary. They also lead "us" to "know" what training is required by literacy workers - paid and volunteer - to support literacy work.

During this research, one college administrator said she has to be careful what she says about what the literacy work in her college means to students because it "goes way beyond our [educational] mandate." She also explained that if teachers cross the boundary with counselling there are "liability issues" and if the college broadly crossed the boundary into therapy, there would be problems with the provincial government saying "this work is funded elsewhere and is separate from the work of an educational institution." She was revealing eloquently both how dominant discourses shape practices in education and how they are resisted.

Although discourses shape what we know, we also shape discourses. Discourses are not fixed for all time. They do not operate independent of people. We participate in them, resist them, and struggle to create alternate discourses to the dominant, taken for granted ones. For example, there is now a growing discourse about connections between violence and learning. As literacy workers increasingly discuss these issues, we begin to create possibilities for new understandings of literacy work, to challenge medicalizing discourses about violence, and explore new literacy practices which recognize impacts of violence on learning. When I led discussion on-line in 1998 more than one hundred people enrolled in the discussion and many talked about their delight in finding others prepared to engage in the issue. One participant said:

> I just got on line and want to leap into the discussion... My desire to jump in is that I have been grappling with how to deal with issues of domestic violence in adult education programs for several years and have so often felt so isolated and without the opportunity to discuss with others how we understand and proactively address the issue. (Hofer in Horsman, 1999/2000)

Finding others who were seeking to find ways to do this work was crucial to many in the on-line discussion – together we were creating new discourses that began to write issues of violence into the literacy frame. I believe that when we come to see the ways that particular

discourses shape our thinking – especially those we are so steeped in we may initially have trouble seeing, because they just reveal "the way it is" - then we become more able to create or participate in alternate, resistant discourses which may open possibilities for new practices.

Seeing our language and practices as discourse offers a tool to get outside a focus on what is "right" and draws attention to examining how certain discourses open and close possibilities. Such an analysis points us to notice our own language closely and explore its implications. In our research focus groups, we invited everyone to become collaborators with us in noticing our language and how it shapes our practice. Susan Heald and I wrote a first paper: R*ethinking Violence and Learning: Moving Research into Practice*[5] exploring the discourses we were beginning to see as blocking change and then used the paper as the basis for further discussion in focus groups for everyone to modify and add to our picture of the discourses and how they work.

Over to you....

Through this current paper I want to enlist you – wherever you are located in the literacy picture – to collaborate in the analysis: to notice whether you hear the same discourses or want to modify or add. I invite you to help to find ways out of the impasses created by discourses that block.

- What will allow us to move from discourses that restrict to ones that enable us to address the issues?
- How will widespread change take place?
- What will allow the literacy movement (and perhaps eventually education more widely) to shift and recognize the prevalence of violence and its impact on learning and make changes that support more learning?

[5] This paper was presented at the Canadian Association for Studies in Education conference in Vancouver, June 2000. It is posted on their web site and at www.jennyhorsman.com. I will not repeat the arguments presented there in this paper, but will summarize the discourses explored.

Discourses about Violence

Over the course of this study I have begun to notice a wide range of awareness about the issue of violence. I have heard a variety of responses when I've asked literacy workers to look at how to take up issues of violence in literacy programs. Some literacy workers had not previously thought about the widespread nature of violence, others know of their own experiences or those of friends or family, and many repeatedly hear stories from students in their classes. Knowing about experiences of violence led some teachers to be sure violence impacted on learning and had to be addressed, even though it was not something spoken about in the field. For them my earlier research and book confirmed something they already knew, as Janice Armstrong from Farmington, Maine said:

> Your book, for me, is just right on. I mean, it's what I've experienced in adult education all these years.

Asked if she discussed this with other teachers this educator replied:

> No, on my personal level in working with people, but not with other teachers. We never really looked at it, identified it, said we need training in this area, we need training in that area. I just felt that this was something I needed to deal with as a teacher. These were issues coming up and they were interfering with what I was trying to do as a teacher, so talking to the person about what they could do - to me was just an automatic kind of thing. But I don't ever recall thinking about bringing this up at a staff meeting and saying this is really something we need to be looking at.

When I asked whether she hadn't brought it up because she feared being told she should not take it on, she laughed and said:

> Maybe that's one of the reasons I didn't talk about it. I didn't want anyone to stop me. (Interview, Farmington, Maine, May 2001)

> May be that's one of the reasons I didn't talk about it. I didn't want anyone to stop me. (Interview, Farmington, Maine, May 2001)

I would like to understand more about what has enabled some literacy workers to "know" that issues of violence are part of their work as a teacher, in spite of the discourses that lead them also to "know" that the issues are not part of literacy work and should not be discussed with colleagues.

Many literacy workers, even those who had heard many stories, said they had not previously paid attention to issues of violence or thought about how violence might impact on learning. Several workers said they had simply thought about violence as part of poverty and not taken account of it separately. One experienced literacy worker at a workshop mused about how obvious the issue seemed as soon as she began to think about it in the workshop. She was surprised at herself and her own organization for not having recognized and addressed the issue previously. But she also commented that many teachers who usually attend professional development sessions were absent from this workshop on the impact of violence on learning. Some may be willing to learn more about the issue as soon as they come to recognize it, others may avoid learning more about it. One teacher told me that she was worried about attending my workshop, thinking it would be difficult but was relieved to realize it was possible to address issues of violence without hearing detailed stories of violence. At many workshops one or two participants have been quite angry about the content of the workshop. Unfortunately, even though I created detailed evaluation forms hoping to elicit feedback on aspects they disliked and learn whether the problem was the issue, my approach, or something else, they rarely offered any more information.

Over to you....

I would like to hear about your approach to issues of violence and their impact on learning:

- How did you come to recognize the prevalence of violence?
- If a workshop were offered in your area on violence and learning would you attend? Why?
- Have you "always" known that violence impacted on learning? Or is it new to you?
- Do you think we should NOT take up issues of violence in literacy programs? If so, why not?
- Are you eager to find a way to address them?

Silence

Janice Armstrong, from New England said:

> We don't talk about violence that much. We tend to ignore it and deny that it's happening. (Interview, Farmington, Maine, May 2001)

There has been a profound silence about the issues of violence in society. There has been much writing about how the silencing of violence in society preserves violence as an individual experience outside the "normal," even when it is commonplace enough to be a normal experience or an everyday risk in women's lives. That silence, along with the widespread nature of the experience, is reflected in literacy programs. Many workers will have experienced violence themselves, or amongst their friends and family, and most will hear about the experiences of students they teach. As Kate Nonesuch, an ABE instructor in British Columbia, said in an on-line conversation:

> In my experience, students will disclose no matter what the content of the curriculum. You can be teaching the "coolest" subject imaginable, fractions, for example, but if you treat them with respect, if you show that you are willing to listen, if you pay attention to what they need, many will respond by disclosing their experiences to you, and perhaps asking for help

in other areas. (NIFL Women and Literacy List, 27.9.2000)

Many workers hear about violent experiences, yet pervasive silence about violence limits discussion about what it means for education.

We have observed a discourse that focuses on silencing all talk about violence. The suggestion is often that it is "better" or "wiser" not to talk, that it "serves no purpose" to open up the issues. Literacy workers realized that even when they were trying to speak about the issue they often found themselves being indirect, worrying about embarrassing the person they were talking to, wondering whether the other wanted to speak about it, not wanting to "break down" the person's defences.

When I sought to start a women's group I found myself choosing not to name violence directly in the advertising or calls to prompt women to attend. I quickly realized that I had to be careful about what I said to others in the women's households or on their answering machines, as I didn't want to increase the risk for any woman currently living in violence. When I did reach women in person I still found I could not speak directly about violence. I did not want women to decide they would not attend the group because they would not want to be known to be going to "that" group, or to decide that it wasn't for them because they hadn't experienced violence. I also did not want to separate out the women who have experienced violence, as I feared that could contribute to a sense that there are normal learners and there are "others" who have experienced violence and need special treatment. I want to argue that educational programs need to change in ways so that everyone, survivor or not, will be able to learn effectively, rather than provide something special for those who have experienced violence. But I worried that by not naming violence directly I was complicit in maintaining silences.

Yet a program worker told me that one student came to her women's empowerment group saying she hadn't experienced violence like other women in the group, and much later she mentioned in passing the times her husband had tried to kill her. When a group is billed as one that is going to address issues of violence, or is for survivors of violence, many women don't attend. In the New England project, more than one literacy program tried to create a group that would focus on violence but found that women didn't attend or attended, but resisted speaking about violence. Some women said they had been through too much violence and didn't want to talk

about it. A direct approach, which appears to open up talk about violence, may unintentionally recreate silence.

Program workers have to learn ways to create a space that names the presence of violence in many women's lives (instructors as well as students). This may mean focusing less on violence and more on creating a space for joy, for building strength to learn, for exploring "healing arts" as processes to support learning and supporting students in learning to resist being controlled and violated. Yet workers still question how to most usefully open a recognition of the presence of violence without pushing women to speak when they would prefer not to and without becoming complicit in silences that leave women isolated and ashamed.

Can of worms

The comment that probably haunts me most is the phrase, "it's a can of worms" which I have heard so often as the response to talk about issues of violence. The clarity that the issue is huge, contributes to silence about the entire area. Don't go there, it's wiser, safer, better left unsaid. The image of breaking silence as opening something far too complex, too messy, too nasty to deal with, that might spill over, is a compelling one – telling us that it is simply not wise to open up the can. Katy Chaffee, a literacy worker in New England, said that every time she mentions violence she feels listeners think immediately of domestic violence and then say, "Oh my god, don't take me there."

Connected to this sense of something unmanageable were repeated comments about it being "too big," too specialized an area, too technical. Frequently this leads to comments like "You would need training to address it." The development of training will be an enormously important aspect if the literacy field is to be able to take on issues of violence with a sense of competence and capacity. I am reminded of one literacy worker in my earlier research who talked about what it was like to feel she did not know what to do. She said she worried about "the build up of feeling inept at your job" and said she did not want to continue to teach adult basic education without "some counselling skills, some training" (Chapter 7, Horsman, 1999/2000). Yet as I listened to workers say that the area is too specialized, it often felt less a demand for training and more a way to say this is not something we should do. Which leads me to question the discourses that tell us what belongs in education.

This isn't violence

In one workshop a participant suggested I add the "this isn't violence" discourse. She felt that attempts to take up the issue in the labour movement were often blocked with the argument that "this isn't violence," so stop making a fuss. In a later conversation she spoke more about her sense of the extent of violence in organizational life in most workplaces that leaves workers so steeped in a culture of violence that it can simply seem "normal" - just the way it is. While enduring violence themselves it may also be difficult for anyone to take on addressing violence issues for others as there may be a tendency to feel "if I can put up with it why can't you."

This sense of "normalcy" reminded me of having heard many times from literacy workers a sense of "this is just the way it is," suggesting that violence had to be accepted. In many workshops where I introduced issues of violence I was told there was little literacy workers could do, because the people they were working with were of a different ethnicity and didn't perceive violence in the experiences the workers identified as violent. Some told me that a particular ethnic group accepted more violence against women than other groups. I have noticed that talk about violence can easily slide into talk about "them" as if "they" are not also us. It seems so much easier to talk about the problems "they" have rather than our own - whether the "they" refers to learners or another class or culture. I've tended to find it useful to name that most cultures seem to have accepted some aspect of violence against women and children, but at the same time activists in each culture struggle to make change. I have suggested that literacy workers find activists from within the religious, cultural or ethnic group and invite them into the classroom to talk about the struggle they are engaged in and open up the possibility of changing conceptions.

Often violence is excused with the explanation that the person is only violent when he is drunk and so is not responsible, perhaps "it doesn't count." Kate Nonesuch suggested:

> Working with learners in Western Canada, I too find alcohol often involved when men beat up women. However, I think they know that if they drink, they may beat their partner, and they get drunk anyway--or maybe they get drunk so that they will be able to beat her up and then have an excuse for doing it.

> Here we give stiff penalties to people who drink and drive, especially people who kill or injure people while they are drunk at the wheel. The law says that they are responsible for whatever they do in a car while they are drunk. I think the same should apply to men who drink and batter.
>
> More positively, I am amazed at the change in attitudes to drinking and driving. While some people still do it, the idea of a designated driver who does not drink but who drives for the rest of the people who are partying, has made its way into the popular culture. Surely we could make the same sort of change in attitudes to violence. (NIFL Women and Literacy List, 19.9.2000)

What counts as violence is contested terrain. This reframing of drinking and violence provides an example of how to change the discourse and to reveal the possibility of shifting recognitions about violence.

Silence is not neutral

A recognition that silence is no safer than opening up issues – it too gives a message - is an important awareness for moving into assessing practically how to break silences about violence. The frames of "it's too big," "it's safer not to open it up," "I don't know what to do so it's better to do nothing" all operate on the assumption that doing nothing is safer, a way of doing no harm, wiser than risking doing the wrong thing. Recently, I have noticed that when I speak about my growing awareness that doing nothing is not neutral, those who were speaking about doing nothing as the wiser choice begin to take careful note and speak as if perhaps they might be prepared to think about taking action.

I frequently tell the story Kate Nonesuch told me of her lesson that doing nothing sends a strong message.

> This instructor reported that when she checked in with a woman student to see if a male student's behaviour was bothering her, the woman remarked that she had seen the instructor watching the interaction. The student said that because the instructor did nothing immediately, she had assumed that meant that the instructor thought the man's behaviour was acceptable. This is a powerful reminder that if an instructor does not take action

> when she sees violence – such as harassment in the classroom, or a woman's bruises - students witness that silence and lack of action and take a message from it. (Horsman 1999/2000)

I found this a chilling reminder of what can be conveyed by silence. What is the message taken when we look at a woman's bruises or subtler indications that she is in a violent relationship or struggling with memories of past abuse and say nothing? Have we given a strong message that we think she deserves the violence, or must just put up with it because there is no option, when we thought our silence was avoiding saying or doing the wrong thing? Have we given a strong message that past or present violence should not be spoken about here, or anywhere?

After one talk I gave about the importance of taking on the issue of violence if many students are to learn, one man talked to me afterwards, and said he was very wary about taking this on. He seemed to be particularly worried that as a man this was not something he could address. I responded with the story I have just told. I suggested that it might be even more important to take the issue on because he is a man. I argued that there is no neutral place for a man. He is either identified with the abuser or offers a different model of a man, one who respects the woman's right to be free of violence and to set her own boundaries. He can challenge assumptions that all men are violent or confirm assumptions that they all approve of violence. One male computer instructor recognized during a workshop that if he was careful about distance as he helped women at the computer and always asked before taking over the mouse or the keyboard, he would model respectful boundaries. In this way he could reduce the possibility that women were fearful of his presence and distracted from learning by their anxiety. Students from one program had told me that the gentle man who taught them computer skills and was very careful about touch and distance had been extremely healing, helping them to learn and to imagine the possibility of men who would not be violent.

Another male instructor at a workshop had talked about his discomfort at his own silence when women came into his class with bruises. Because he was not from the same culture as the students and they were not telling him that the injuries were caused by male violence, he felt unable to say anything. Together we thought about what he could say that respected their silence, did not make him the

say: "I don't know how you got those bruises, but if somebody hurt you I want you to know that I don't think violence against another person is ever OK. Nobody ever deserves to be hurt." I have not heard if he used his prepared approach, and do not know how it has been received, but I have offered many workers that approach since in the hope that it could give a clear message about violence. Preparing a response to a range of possible situations can be very helpful for both men and women in literacy – helping to avoid the silences that give messages we would rather not send out.

Increasingly, I have come to argue that there is no neutral place to reach by staying silent. Silence gives the message of complicity with the dominant messages of society that condone violence. We can break the silence using posters, pamphlets, reading materials for students and teachers, workshops, ground rules about violence, and responding clearly to violence and to the pressure to "get over it." When I was asked to create a tutor training kit[6] I wrote a set of statements: *Key Messages*[7] about the unacceptability of violence and asked literacy workers to discuss how they might make these messages visible in their program. One worker was a little uncomfortable with the idea of prescriptive statements, but others had many ideas about ways to make these statements (or modified versions) visible in their programs, including making individual posters with each statement to display in the program.

Naming violence is not disclosing

Katy Chaffee, a literacy worker in the New England project, mentioned that the disclosures she hears in groups using the arts to explore well-being and support women's learning in her welfare to work program do not burn her out the way disclosures did in the course of her more traditional teaching work, heard around the edges of teaching. She thought the difference was the stories emerge within the class as part of each woman bringing her whole self to learning. In that instance, they were not in a "fix it" frame, but were simply part of the naming of the presence of the whole person, including her past or present experience with violence. In contrast Katy Chaffee realized

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[6] *Drawing the Line: Dealing with affective issues in literacy* is available from the Saskatchewan Literacy Network at their website at NALD:
http://www.nald.ca/Province/Sask/SLN/Resource/newordrs/drawline.htm

[7] See appendix for an edited version of the "key messages" included in the kit.

or present experience with violence. In contrast Katy Chaffee realized she had been exhausted by hearing stories previously in a frame that said, "I have this problem – fix it" while it was also not part of the work. This recognition might be useful for other workers in the face of the fear that opening up the issue will be overwhelming.

When teaching an intensive women's group in which I was seeking to name and recognize that most women would have experienced violence, and to support them in discovering their strengths as learners, I was quite surprised to learn that the rest of the staff assumed I was hearing disclosures of the details of the violence women in the group had experienced regularly. They seemed immensely relieved when I told them this was not the case. I think they feared that I was opening an expectation that all instructors would be ready to hear stories in detail. Naming the presence of violence does not mean moving to a place with no boundaries where all stories can be told at all times. Clarifying this seems to be a huge relief to many workers who assume that is what naming the presence of violence will inevitably mean. In retrospect, I realize that after a three month intensive course with a group of women I know no details of the abuse they have all experienced. I know they have experienced much violence. I saw tears often, as they remembered how badly they had been mistreated in the past. I heard a little about the crises they lived as they sought to find a way to continue their studies and hold their lives together. But I did not hear details. The acceptance that violence was present in their lives, the availability of counselling supports and their own acknowledgement that each other's stories would be too hard to hear, meant they were all careful to limit what they shared.

As literacy workers begin to publicly explore ways of naming violence and of making the presence of the impact of violence on learning clear, and to experiment with innovative ways to support the learning of all students, new discourses of violence and literacy will begin to be formed. Janet Isserlis, a literacy researcher focussing on issues of violence and learning, from Rhode Island, suggested that it is important to notice that when we begin to name violence many of us are drawn to all or nothing approaches. We will dive right in and open everything up. She suggested that it might be helpful to explore middle ground – ways of "layering into considerations of violence that bring it to light gradually, subtly" (e-mail correspondence, 5.5.2001).

In this way we may be prepared to believe we can open the "can of worms" without chaos erupting!

"What about the men?"

During workshop the question about men's experience often came up. Although the detail varied – what about men's experience of abuse as children and as adults, men as students, and occasionally men as abusers – the oft repeated question seemed to suggest that it is not legitimate (or not possible) to talk about women's experience unless we also take account of men's experience at the same time. In one workshop the literacy worker seemed angry that I dared to focus my research, and my workshop, on women. Even though I agreed that research on men's experience is also important and suggested that men in literacy needed to take that on, he was not mollified. Margaret McPartland, an administrator in New England, commented that there is not enough research about men who are victims of violence, and wondered whether it existed but she just didn't know about it. She thought it was important for women's sake saying: "Whatever affects men, affects the women too." For some the focus on material about violence seemed to be seen as women's material, only suitable to be used in women only groups. Others were eager to talk about the tension of taking up issues in mixed groups with men they knew to be abusive in the class. I was also often asked about women as abusers, towards each other and particularly towards children.

Medicalizing Violence

The aftermath of violence is spoken about primarily in medical terms. This sets the scene for an approach to issues of violence in education that is clearly focussed on diagnosing who has a problem and referring them for "help." That process can easily become one of sending them away to deal with it. Several literacy workers said that counsellors tell students they need to deal with their issues before they come to school. One counsellor said when he told his supervisor that one of his students needed more support or was in danger of dropping out, his supervisor asked whether it was: "appropriate for her to be here in the first place? Would it make more sense for her to be somewhere else?"

This approach leads to a focus on the diagnosis of an ailment, and a frame that "normal" students can cope with the education system, those who cannot, must have something wrong with them. They need to change, but the education system can remain the same. Literacy workers commented on how saying "you need to talk to a counsellor" can be silencing, giving the impression that the person who has begun to tell is not normal, and has special problems that need to be dealt with outside of the classroom. Recently, I was asked to review a pamphlet written for front-line workers in a range of services because the authors were wondering whether it might be useful in literacy. It did include much useful information but the focus was on identifying clients who are suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and convincing them that they need medical help. I was concerned that such a booklet would strengthen the medicalizing and individualizing approach to the aftermath of violence and deepen the divide with literacy, rather than strengthen the recognition of the complexity of women's lives

"Dealt with it"

We noticed that workers were surprised to find themselves talking about their own experiences of violence, and we got the sense this rarely happens in the literacy field. Several colleagues seemed to be talking with each other about their own experience with violence for the first time. We also felt we heard a discourse of "dealt with it," in relation to whatever experiences workers had been through themselves. Later, in a focus group, several workers agreed they did feel pressure to have "dealt with" their experiences. One worker said that when working with students triggered her own memories of abuse, she took a leave of absence and wondered whether she had disqualified herself as a literacy worker.

This discourse parallels the pressure on learners to go away and heal if experiences of violence are getting in the way of learning. For workers, it seems that pressure to have "dealt with it" increases the separation between workers and learners: professionals give help, they don't need help. This silences possibilities for talking about how their work impacts on them. Several literacy workers talked about the difficulty of trusting colleagues and asking for support if they are triggered in the classroom. It seems to be part of the discourse of the professional that you have "dealt with all this stuff." This leaves unquestioned the idea that there is a place where violence is left

behind and won't be triggered by life experiences. In the face of a discourse of this sort, workers would avoid anything that might make it clear to them and to others that they haven't "dealt with" their past and put it behind them. For "survivors" of violence, then, there is the danger of opening up issues of violence in the classroom. Those who have little experience of violence may feel ill-equipped and inexperienced to take up the issue in the literacy program. Perhaps they may even be wary of discovering common ground with those who know they have experienced violence – leading to questions about their own experience.

I'm not a therapist.

I often heard a teacher say she could not address issues of violence in any way because "I'm not a therapist." This couples with the notion that violence issues create medical problems to be addressed by a therapist, which also excludes teachers from "doing therapy." The discourse of the professional fosters the belief that because teachers are not trained as therapists, and because emotional and violence issues are properly subject matter for therapy, teachers should not take up issues of violence.

This division of the professions sets up the idea that "there are liability issues if teachers who are not trained therapists act like therapists." Teachers believe this is not their terrain. Students also share this discourse. On several occasions when I talked about emotions blocking learning with a literacy group, students have asked whether I am a psychiatrist, or therapist, or questioned whether we are still doing literacy. They, too, know the discourse and remind me that I have strayed away from the expected ground of education. This assumption that anything to do with violence or emotions must be doing therapy, limits the possibilities for exploring new educational practices. I do not want to suggest that teachers should "do therapy," though we may want to learn from the therapeutic field as we explore new ways of teaching and practices that recognize the emotions and draw on the whole self to support learning. Through such exploration we may redefine the taken for granted divide between the work of educators and therapists.

Living beside...

Tanya Lewis (1999) offers a reconceptualization of the impact of violence which allows for moving away from medicalizing the impact of violence and shifts from discourses that suggest there can be a place of having "dealt with" trauma. The conceptualization of a journey from sickness to health puts impossible demands on survivors of trauma. When they are expected to put their experiences behind them and "get over it," pressure mounts to do so, or at least to appear to have done so.

Lewis offers an alternative conceptualization that contrasts with the medical model of sickness and healing, the image of "living beside the violation." She asserts that the experiences of trauma "live on" and suggests a new frame, "familiarity with violence:"

> Living beside the violation becomes much more possible if I understand myself as someone who is familiar with violence rather than someone whose life experience is pathologized. My familiarity with violence contributes to my knowledge, my sense of strength and my capacity for empathy rather than as something tainted with pathology that must be overcome. (Unpublished presentation, 1998)[8]

Though medical diagnoses can be reassuring (and sometimes useful[9]) to a person who has experienced trauma, they can also be a trap, identifying a sickness to be cured, leading to self-blame or blame from others, when she is not cured fast enough, cannot leave the pain behind, get on with "normal" life again and learn successfully. This trap can be particularly acute in literacy. The experience of taking part in a literacy program can potentially explore possibilities of living beside trauma. But, if literacy workers have learned the medicalizing and pathologizing discourses well, then workers and learners will seek to show they have left violence and its impacts behind or risk the judgement they are not "ready" to be there.

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[8] These concepts were articulated by Tanya Lewis as part of her thesis defence - I thank her for the tremendous insight of such metaphors for enabling a vision outside medicalizing discourses.

[9] Thanks to Nicole Ysabet-Scott for her insights about how a student can use medical diagnoses to bargain concessions from the academic system which may make it easier to gain entry or achieve success within the formal academic system.

Canaries in the mine

I also found the metaphor of people who have experienced violence as like "canaries in the mine"[10] useful for shifting from more pathologized views to approaches that recognize nowhere is free of violence, there is no safe place to retreat to and heal. Instead, it offers the idea that those who have experienced violence are like the canaries, offering a warning that the levels of violence in society are toxic to us all. It is not they who must return to "normal" and accept future possibilities of violence, but society which must change and reduce the ongoing possibility of violation, particularly for women and children. The concept of living beside trauma, along with the idea of survivors as canaries in the mine, shifts away from the demand to act "normal" and get over it. This invites all survivors, whether learners or teachers, to honour their experience of trauma and impacts on the self, rather than seek to deny and hide them.

These new discourses also allow for an opening to tears and a recognition of their value. In my group, I heard myself and others often saying, "Don't cry." Checking this response to tears with other literacy workers I heard from several First Nations instructors that in their traditions tears are to be valued as life-giving, and a means of honouring the grief and those who are trusted to bear witness to the grief. Other instructors were often aware that they, too, had sought to quell tears in themselves and others. Although they were, on the one hand wanting to recognize the value of tears, they, too, drew on the well-worn phrase "don't cry," when seeking to offer a comforting comment. Yet this comment denies the value of expressing feeling. The concept of honouring traumatized parts of the self is consistent with the Aboriginal tradition of valuing tears. Lewis explains what this shift means to her:

> Living beside means acknowledging the traumatized parts of self as they arise in daily life. It means honouring them and giving them space for expression. As soon as I resist and refuse these parts of myself, I quickly move back into relationships and a sense of self that reflect past patterns of survival. When I honour the trauma, I gain the flexibility to move into different parts of myself to create new possibilities. (Lewis, 1999:120)

[10] Thanks to Susan Heald for this concept and for all her help in recognizing the discourses of violence and education.

Over to you....

- Do any of these discourses of violence sound familiar to you?
- Do you have examples of how they block or enable you to take up issues of violence in literacy?
- Do you hear other discourses that block or enable?
- Can you imagine new possibilities for discourses that would enable literacy programs to take up issues of violence?

Discourses about Education

In our first paper on this research we described several discourses of education that became visible to us through the research. I want to outline these briefly here.

Violence as a barrier to learning

This discourse bridges divides between violence and education, but does it in a way that preserves dominant discourses about violence and education. The concept of violence as a barrier to learning initially seemed as if it might open up the possibility of addressing issues of violence. It has increasingly been a way that I and others have found not only to open talk about the impact of violence on learning, but also to argue for funding to address these issues. However, I have gradually come to see that although it may reveal women's felt experience of ceasing to learn after an incident of abuse, it does not reveal what is learned though violence or the ways in which that learning is in accord or in conflict with other learnings for girls in western society.

Judy Titzel, a literacy worker from Providence, Rhode Island, modified this approach by stressing the widespread existence of violence as a systemic barrier to women's learning. She argued "the pervasiveness of violence is preventing equal access to quality education for women." This approach allows attention to move from the individual who experiences violence to a consideration of what quality education might look like and to the broad range of systemic barriers to creating that quality for all students in all levels and types of educational setting.

In contrast the focus on a barrier to individual learning separates out those who have experienced violence and conceptualizes them as "other," maintaining a concept of the normal student who has not experienced violence. Students who have experienced violence may be seen as having "special needs," or needs which should be addressed outside the education system, while the educational system itself can remain unchanged.

This discourse also contributes to assumptions that only literacy learners will have experienced violence, as those who have successfully negotiated the education system can not have experienced these barriers. This allows other educational institutions to ignore the issue entirely. Or this appproach can lead, as happened in one of our focus groups, to questions about how those who do succeed in the educational system in spite of having experienced violence did so, with the idea that may be this knowledge could be helpful to allow success for those who have failed. This direction opens many questions about what is success, and success at what cost?

The severed head[11]

One possible cost is the "severed head." The educational system can be a place of escape for the mind, but can, at the same time, contribute to a fragmentation of the whole person. Western educational systems do not often invite the whole person into the learning process. Success in this system is often gained at the cost of balance of the whole self. For those who have experienced violence and already feel fragmented, this further severance may be particularly costly. Those who have sought to create a space in literacy programs to draw the whole self into the learning process have been able to do so only when they can find a space outside the discourses of "proper teaching" and "acceptable outcomes" through working in the guise of research or with the protection of special project funding. Yet workers in the New England project, for example, who are using "healing arts" as part of their experimental literacy work, speak with enormous enthusiasm about the shifts they see in themselves and in the students who participate in the program.

[11] Sylvia Fraser speaks of taking her severed head to college and seeking to bury emotions and self-hate through putting together a "rational and successful person" she could respect. (1987:130)

To attempt to bring the whole person into the teaching and learning process is to go against the widely shared sense of the "real" work of education. Instructors talked about their recognition that when time is short they get drawn back to practising math and steered away from spending time on supporting students to reflect on their learning and to learn about learning, even when they believed in the importance of the alternative approach. They were surprised to see how the pressure to do proper teaching operates.

Similarly, I have increasingly noticed that when I speak about the importance of focussing on issues of violence my listeners often veer into talk about the methodology of teaching reading. I am reminded the value of one method over another is an appropriate focus in education, especially in literacy, but talk about violence and the necessity of bringing the whole self into the learning process is not. In response to one talk about silences about violence and learning and the necessity of shifting discourses of education in order to encompass the experience of violence, I was asked in the silence that followed about the merits of whole language over phonics. Violence was not mentioned again. On another occasion, after speaking at length about violence, the impact of violence on learning and the need to shift discourses of violence and education, I was asked what I thought about probing into the past of a child who is failing to learn to read, in order to diagnose whether violence is the cause, and how to teach those failing kids to read successfully. It was clear the questioner was looking for method, not suggestions about changing the education system, curriculum or creating space to bring the whole self to learning.

The "correct" ways to be a student or teacher are well-known, the apparent neutrality of this discourse makes it appear that one's competence as a student is a function of the presence or absence of personal qualities, rather than biases concealed within the discourse. One administrator talked about the "why don't they just" mentality, as she often heard that question asked by instructors and saw it as a way that the discourse places demands on the student. Learners who don't conform to the requirements of the good student are judged as unmotivated, not ready, not committed. One counsellor said "there is a sense held by some that if you can't handle the education system you're not normal. Such attitudes dismiss the diversity and needs of students." The good student does not have problems. This frame

allows the educational system to continue unchanged, as if everyone knows how to learn and to be a student, and those that don't ought to.

Drawing the line

At the end of one workshop a teacher came up to me. She had just realized that the approach "they won't learn until they're ready" is another discourse that works against taking on issues of violence. She suggested that the work that might be necessary to help a student get to a point where they are ready to learn is made invisible in the institution, a task for the student alone to deal with. Now she was rethinking, realizing that there might be a crucial role for the institution and the teacher to support that process. The taken for granted discourse draws a line between the preparation work to be done by the student and tasks appropriate to be carried out within the institution.

Drawing the line is also often used to describe the "self-evident" divide between literacy work and therapy. As suggested earlier in this paper, this shared assumption helps to rule inadmissible any talk that might be identified as doing therapy in the classroom. Because there is clarity about what is outside the role of teacher, and in college settings there are counsellors on site, institutions can provide no support and no recognition for teachers who take on a role of supporting students struggling to learn. But, over and over again, we heard that counsellors in institutions often focus on "advising" instead of counselling, that counselling hours are insufficient for students to see counsellors. In community-based programs without counsellors on-site, teachers worry about the long waiting lists and lack of appropriate free counselling in the community. These pressures lead some teachers to feel that they have no option but to counsel. But if they do so, they take on the work illicitly, without resources, office space, supports, time and with the risk of being blamed for becoming "over-involved." Institutions benefit from this unpaid, unacknowledged work, while teachers can be framed as the problem.

What is missing?

We also heard often about the ways in which expectations about education were framed by particular situations. In various settings, instructors spoke about the challenge of taking up issues of violence

given the specific lack of resources students and teachers experienced, the lack of institutional support for their work, and the outright hostility of some colleagues or the subtler resistances. Structural constraints such as attendance policies and waiting lists for places in programs increased the challenge. Literacy workers at Parkdale Project Read, a community-based literacy program in Ontario, mused about whether they would need to move from using volunteer tutors if they were to adequately address issues of violence:

> Would it mean that we don't use tutors in fact, because we don't get a consistent quality of tutoring? Can we really address this stuff in a 16 hour tutor training? I don't know that we can do that. I mean, to do it effectively—we do our best, but the tutor training is not enough.... Does it mean that we do a completely different screening process, does it mean that we don't actually have tutors? I don't know. (Interview, Toronto, Ontario, March 2000)

Committed literacy workers were open to thinking about this challenge, but the lack of funding to make a shift from volunteers a realistic possibility, along with the lack of time for reflection and professional development, limits the possibilities for radical solutions. In the same program, the level of stress was revealed as they talked about the difficulty of taking on this work in the total absence of supports:

> I think we could do more, I think we could take more chances without feeling irresponsible about it, because *you open up this can of worms*, possibly, with people, you encourage this kind of speaking about their feelings and then—my sense is that there are no resources in the community. So, people have their defence mechanisms for a reason, and *who are we to try and pry them open* and then they have no supports to... but if there was this on-site counsellor... we'd always know that there's extra supports.
>
> Even if we went to get information from a counsellor and talked about students... We could deal with some of the problems better if we had some backup. (Interview, Toronto, Ontario, March 2000)

The discourses outlined earlier - the can of worms and the fear that naming is demanding disclosure - remain in place. They are hard to shift without supports to risk embarking on this new terrain.

Safety is fundamental

In the first paper from this research we argued that the lack of a discourse about safety limited what instructors could take on, given organizations that didn't recognize the need for safety for instructors and students alike. We suggested that the lack of a discourse about safety leaves teachers responsible to cope with everything that happens in the classroom. We explored an example of a teacher stretching to try to contain a loud, angry student so that everyone could learn. We speculated what learning organizations would look like if safe, relaxed settings for learning were a priority.

When we took this paper back to instructors I was surprised to learn that Kate Nonesuch didn't think there was an absence. She was regularly able to make use of a discourse around safety in her class. She described one way she uses to draw attention to issues for everyone in her class and create a climate that will be safer for everyone to learn.

> We have one computer that has the internet. I have made it very clear that we don't allow porn, but they do go onto some pretty raunchy chat lines. The computer that has the internet is the one at the teacher's desk because it's the fastest computer. I don't sit at that desk anytime during the day, but I often have to get into the drawer or get my bag, so I often have a reason for walking behind the guy who's on the internet. One day in class I said that I felt unsafe when I noticed on the screen that people were talking about what kind of sexual things they were going to do to women, that I felt unsafe when the guy came off the screen and walked over to ask for help doing math, that it made me uncomfortable knowing that he had just finished talking about sex and a particular kind of sex. So, I wanted to know if other people felt unsafe and what kind of agreement we could make. People went around and agreed that this wasn't conducive to safety. So I said something about how easy it is to find yourself in sleazy places by accident, on line, but now that you know that people feel unsafe when you're there, you have a responsibility to get out for the safety of the group... I keep

> checking and I haven't come across it since then. This has since become centre policy. (Interview, Duncan, British Columbia, June 2000)

A focus on safety can support learning in a variety of ways, making it feel safer for instructors to open the "can of worms," knowing how to approach this work while maintaining a safe environment for teachers and students. This same instructor described what this looks like in her setting:

> So when a student discloses to me, I can listen, honour her telling, and ask if she has someone to talk to. If she says yes, then I know I'm not on the spot for being the main counsellor. If she says no, then I pull out the little card [of services in the community], and because it is a small community, she will usually have a connection at one or two of the programs listed there, and be willing to go in to talk to someone.
>
> This back-up makes it possible for me to refer to violence and abuse in class, in the material we read, for example, or in the activities we do. I give lots of warning before we read it--"the story we are going to read tomorrow is hard to read emotionally. It is about a girl who was sexually abused--" and students have the freedom to come to the reading class or to work in the other room with the other teacher. I give the warning so students who don't want to hear it can keep themselves safe. Other students come and some will disclose.
>
> I like it better when people disclose to a small reading group, rather than in secret to me, even though they may tell me privately more details than they reveal in group. The culture at our Centre is that abuse is wrong, and that nobody deserves violence, no matter what they do. (Nonesuch, NIFL Women and Literacy List, 27.9.2000)

A discourse of safety can open talk about what might be required to maintain it and what exactly it might look like in each context.

Over to you.....

- Do any of these discourses of education sound familiar to you?
- Do you have examples of how they block or enable you to take up issues of violence in literacy?
- Do you hear other discourses of education that block or enable?
- Can you imagine new possibilities for discourses that would enable literacy programs (and education more broadly) to take up issues of violence?

Integrating New Discourses

When literacy workers imagined the possibilities of shifting discourses and creating spaces for new practices in adult literacy, they often spoke of constraints within their own institutions and within government discourses. They struggled with the limitations that could not be moved unless they could shift the frames of their work at the highest levels. Teachers might feel the constraints from the administration, but administrators were clear that they were limited by provincial or state constraints and policy change was needed at that level. In different provinces and states, literacy workers itemized a similar direction of government policy which they saw as completely opposite to what was needed if the lives of learners were to be taken into account and issues of violence taken up within educational practice:

> It feels like there's a constant tension between [the ministry] and integrating this stuff into the program. You're constantly sort of going like this [stretches in two directions], because it doesn't fit, it doesn't fit in the matrix, there's no way, there's nowhere for any of this stuff to be recorded. ...So it seems like the only way out is to diversify the funding and not be so dependent on [government] and then have the freedom to go the way you want to go as opposed to the way you have to go. (Interview, Toronto, Ontario, March 2000)

In programs lacking space to rethink possibilities and flexibility to carry out new ideas, workers talked about trying to cope and feeling unable to stretch to even think about new approaches. Where any space could be created – through professional development, supportive colleagues and supervisors, project funding, counselling supports – literacy workers are carrying out ground-breaking work.

Provide legitimacy for new concepts of education

Literacy workers who had the opportunity to take part in special projects talked glowingly about the possibility created to explore the unknown and to launch into unlikely experiments. Funding paid for and legitimized talk about new possibilities, allowed for new collaborations, supported a focus on creating beauty in the classroom

and made it possible to try out new curriculum such as learning about learning, self-empowerment, writing and creative arts. It is only within such a space that new models could be generated to demonstrate the "success" of shifting what counts in education and provide a basis for challenging policy.

Katy Chaffee, a participant in the World Education project, described the project as a "life raft." A life raft provides safety in a dangerous situation, and literacy workers talked often about the project shifting them out of isolation, creating a supportive group working towards a shared goal. Being part of this group allowed them to withstand the expectations of others about what constitutes the work, permissible items to fund, and appropriate ways to carry out the work. Colleagues in their programs talked about becoming more aware of what is going on in students' lives. This attention helped them to shift the common tendency to blame students, saying "she's not trying hard enough," and reminded them of what they "know but may not regularly think about."

Many of the programs, encouraged perhaps, by my experimentation, transformed the physical space where groups met and were able to justify spending on things that might usually have been seen as frills, such as flowers and food. As Char Caver, a literacy worker in New England, said:

> Food has symbolic meaning. Food as nurturance has been an important part of the program. People feel taken care of. (Interview, Dorchester, Massachusetts, March 2001)

Each program spent some time and money on creating a physical space that showed women they were respected and valued, provided beauty and nurturing food and music. The opportunity to try making change in a way that might often be judged frivolous and inessential, allowed them to see hoped for changes in women. Transforming the physical space did transform the "inner spiritual space" of the women. Flowers were experienced by women as something that gave them hope. Workers described the flowers as a "metaphor for [students'] own growth, their own lives." The opportunity to create change in this way allowed the workers and the students some "space" outside the everyday experience of violence. Char Caver said it created space for the possibility of hope. She questioned the prevalent attitude in human services, of always making do with "less than," and

appreciated a program she had seen where they had said to the participants:

> We value you. We value your endeavour. So we put the resources here to show this. We're not just saying it in words. (Interview, Dorchester, Massachusetts, March 2001)

How often do literacy workers feel that they and their endeavour are not valued, and then stretch to try to offer both the resources and the concrete message to students that the students and their efforts are valued? For women who have been devalued this may be the most crucial message to make learning possible.

Char Caver valued a training that confirmed her own belief in the importance of "acting outside the oppression" in order not to "repeat the oppression." Workers in several programs talked about how easily their own way of working with each other and with students could be part of the "whole structure of violence." Taking part in a project that offered a little extra space could allow literacy workers the opportunity to "ditch the craziness" for a little while and create some well-being for themselves and their students. The question for many who participated was, how to get that message heard more broadly in a climate that was, as several said, getting worse, not better.

Draw new lines between healing and learning

Project funding also created the time and space to explore building connections and collaborations with therapists and healers, and integrate the creative arts into learning opportunities. Instead of trying to draw a line to divide these areas of work, literacy workers had permission and support to explore drawing new lines to link work that is connected within each person, and imagine new programming and new collaborations. Literacy workers often spoke about the new insights these collaborations gave and about the freedom of knowing that they had support in the form of somebody to whom they could take the tensions and worries of their work. Programs explored co-leading groups with a counsellor; having local counsellors offer training for themselves and their colleagues; meeting with counsellors in study circles to learn more about the intersections of their work; and meeting individually or in staff teams with counsellors who could help them think through problems.

My own experience with meeting regularly with a counsellor offered me new insights into my self as a facilitator, new ideas for how to work with the group, support to try new ways of interacting with some students and new language to talk about the work with others. I was always lightened by meeting and talking, by being heard and hearing new possibilities. I noticed that sometimes we could slide into approaches that felt too close to therapy, but other times we were able together to discover new modes that did not invite me to act like a therapist, or stay in the old model of teacher, but instead invented a new place from which to act. For example, I could explore ways of using an easy chair in the corner of the room as a place for women to retreat to when they wanted a rest from participating in the group, but wanted to continue to listen. I could become clearer at seeing this way of providing space for emotions and a container for the tension and fear of taking on difficult work. It was something therapeutic that offered enormous potential for supporting learning in the educational classroom. I came to realize, from mentioning these ideas or new understandings to the rest of the staff, that this practice of talking to a counsellor might also provide them with valuable support. The staff began to meet with the therapist when they felt it would be useful, sometimes individually and sometimes together. They valued these sessions so much that when we ran out of money, all knew our first priority was to find a way to continue the practice.

Women in several New England programs spoke eloquently about the gains they saw in women who participated in innovative classes. Programs began groups they labelled: empowerment, wellness, love yourself, mindfulness, and so on. The common ingredient was allowing space for women to explore themselves and their lives. Programs used journal writing, meditation, yoga, relaxation, collage, quilting and other healing arts in a variety of ways. They brought in counsellors, artists and a wide variety of teachers. They arrived at trainings which brought all the workers participating in the project together full of stories of the transformation they saw through this process. One central challenge remains what valuable supports to learning and growth they will be able to continue and integrate into the on-going program after the special project funding ends.

Where to from here?

Drawing new lines linking literacy and healing may offer great potential for learning. A key question now is whether the literacy movement will be able to build on the discourses which support diverse possibilities for teaching in ways that recognize the widespread nature of violence and the impact of violence on learning. Change is already occurring in many individual literacy programs. As new discourses become more broadly recognized, the simple divide between literacy and therapy may shift. Addressing the impact of violence on learning may seem less of a "can of worms" and more enticing, offering the potential for creating nurturing spaces for workers and learners alike. Or, as Tammy L. Stockman a job coach based in New England suggested, maybe we can come to see worms as life-giving and necessary for growth, not something to be contained at all cost. I am left with questions about what will allow discourses of violence and education to shift radically in order to create the necessary, widespread change in the whole terrain of literacy work.

Over to you....

I hope that as you have read this paper you have been agreeing and disagreeing, adding examples in your mind perhaps some illustrate a discourse I am describing, may be others reveal a discourse I have not written about or reveal a problem with my analysis so far.

I hope I have enlisted you – wherever you are located in the literacy picture – to find ways out of the impasses created by discourses that block.

- What will allow us to move from discourses that restrict and to create and strengthen ones that enable us to address the issues?
- What will allow the literacy movement to shift (and perhaps eventually education more widely) and recognize the prevalence of violence and its impact on learning and make changes that support more learning?

I hope you will give me feedback, but I also hope you will continue to "worry" at these questions, noticing your own words and thinking and those of colleagues. I hope you will engage in conversation about these issues with others and explore new ways of framing the intersection of literacy and violence and practice new approaches.

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